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ABSTRACT

The Arapahoe Regional Library District and the Sheridan School District, in Colorado, cooperated in developing a library to serve both high school students and the general community. Initially funded by a Library Services and Construction Act grant, this cooperative venture succeeded because of the intense preplanning done by school and library personnel closely associated with the project, the committment on both sides to the idea that the operation was beneficial to both parties, the shared staffing responsibilities, the written statement of procedures and assignment of responsibility, and library personnel who understood each other's philosophies and duties. (LS)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL - PUBLIC LIBRARY COOPERATION IN SHERIDAN, COLORADO

A paper presented to the American Library Trustees Association at the 94th Annual Conference of the American Library Association, in San Francisco, on June 28, 1975.

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I have been asked to tell you some of the details of the cooperative project which has been in operation in Sheridan, Colorado involving the Arapahoe Regional Library District and the Sheridan School District. This project was begun in the fall of 1971 during the construction of a new high school building. The public library was invited to participate in the planning of the library of the new school with a possibility of an agreement being reached for the operation of a joint public library-public school facility.

The Arapahoe Regional Library District is responsible for library service to the people living in the unincorporated areas or in the incorporated towns having no public libraries in Arapahoe County, Colorado. Sheridan is a small incorporated city of about 5,000 population within the library district. It is relatively low income area in relation to most of the library district with an average income of $9,000 approximately; about one-fourth of the population is Spanish/Mexican-American. The community has no real community center; it is surrounded by the cities of Denver, Englewood, and Littleton with little room for growth. Some industry is present; however, many of the people work in the cities which surround Sheridan. The new high school was planned for use by the total community; the auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library are grouped within the building with access to any of these facilities possible by the public without entering the academic areas. The city's only library service for some years had been bookmobile visits to the schools and a shopping center on a weekly basis and access to nearby municipal libraries through the reciprocal borrowing program of the Central Colorado Public Library System. This latter program is funded through the State Library.

The library district was a little reluctant to agree to embark on a joint facility primarily because of an earlier unsuccessful experiment with a school district in another part of the library district and because the expense of such a project had not been anticipated in the approved budget for that year. However, it was decided by the district Board of Trustees that if some financial assistance could be obtained through the LSCA funds administered by the Colorado State Library and if an agreement could be reached with the Sheridan School District regarding procedures, it would make another attempt to cooperate in a joint facility.

The library district was given an LSCA grant which enabled it to purchase a basic collection for the library, both books and periodicals. The grant also covered the salaries for six months of two staff members who processed the materials as they were received from the various vendors.

A planning committee composed of the superintendent of schools, the high school principal, school librarian, the library director of the library district, a consultant from the Colorado State Library, members of the staff of the Southeastern Metropolitan Board of Cooperative Services (SEMBCS) which would be ordering and processing the school library materials, and several community leaders met regularly to discuss furnishings, materials, and staffing for the facility. In reaching an agreement with the school district, the public library district leaned heavily on the experience it had had in its earlier experiment. Several points were outstanding: (1) the need for total committment on both sides to the idea that such an operation was beneficial to both parties; (2) the necessity for both parties to be responsible for staffing the facility; and (3) the need to put into writing exact procedures

to be followed and the need to assign responsibilities for operation in three ways - the school's area of responsibility, the public library's area, and the area of mutual or joint responsibility.

These three points, we felt, were of importance since in the earlier experiment little or no close communication with the school administration took place once the project was undertaken; there was no school librarian, and the public librarians found themselves playing a role for which they were unprepared. Children by-passed their own materials which were in another area and used the public area constantly. The physical location and arrangement of the library was a decision made by the school district; the public library was not consulted. The location of the library in the center of the school meant the passage of children through it several times daily in large numbers, a dampening feature for the general public. Cooperative planning in the areas of book selection, programs, etc., could not be done in view of the fact that this particular school was one of many elementary schools operated in the school district with centralized book purchasing and without any real interest in a cooperative approach to total community use. It was an innovative idea in school building planning with the school district administration believing that public use was the problem of the public library. The public library, in this case, became a school library during the school day with the general public use coming from only a small area of population. The project became too expensive for the library district to continue in view of the public use, and the relationship between the school and the library district became more and more unsatisfactory.

The agreement reached between the library district and the Sheridan School District which has been renewed for the third time, is a good one. It has, in fact, become a model contract which is sent to inquiring school or public library agencies from the Colorado State Library.

The LSCA grant to the library district which covered the cost of the basis public library collection at Sheridan was spent for materials selected with careful attention to the planned materials purchases of the school district. Public library materials were chosen with a view to their use by the general public and as supplementary materials for student use; strictly curriculum oriented materials were avoided, these being the responsibility of the school district. Lists of books and periodicals were made and compared to eliminate possible duplications. All fiction, with a very few exceptions, is provided from the public library budget. Juvenile materials, ranging from pre-school to sixth grade, are purchased by the public library. Popular books in paperback are present in the library; these are mostly donated by patrons, although some are purchased to fill a need for multiple copies of a popular work. Books are shelved together, with only the ownership stamp indicating the two budgets in operation. Selection of materials continues to be made by cooperative planning for the needs of the various groups using the joint facility.

The Sheridan Library is staffed throughout the school year by a professionally trained librarian, an audio-visual technologist, and student assistants provided by the school district; the public library provides a professionally trained librarian, a library assistant, and a

paid part-time student assistant. Hours on duty overlap, with a public librarian working throughout the school day also; the public librarian, while attending to public and/or elementary school visits, is available for service to high school students and faculty in the absence of the school librarian during school hours. The public library staff is responsible for service after school hours until 9 p.m. four days each week, all day Saturday, and is completely responsible for library service during the summer months since there is no school program in Sheridan in summer.

Programs for students and the general public are planned by all staff, both school and public with due regard for each other's unique function. A community library committee meets monthly to discuss library needs of the community and to devise ways and means to supplement the school district's funds for library service. The community committee also gives support to the public library through publicity to the general public about the services available to it at the Sheridan Library and provides needed personnel to help with community programs taking place in the library. Funds are raised primarily through an annual used book sale and a book fair; the committee has been instrumental in obtaining a allocation of revenue sharing funds from the city this year for community library use. This committee is composed of school administrators from the elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school; librarians from the various schools and the public library; general community members; the library district director; and Sheridan city government. Problems are

aired, discussed, and solutions or compromises found.

Both parties to the contractual agreement feel the project is successful. No difficulties have been encountered which could not be resolved. Community use is growing slowly but steadily, and the school population is highly satisfied. We feel that a need is being met in an efficient and economical way.

Reviewing the Sheridan - Arapahoe Regional Library project and other such projects either in operation or planned about which I have read, certain aspects must, I feel, be given special consideration. Of primary importance is the necessity for discussion of the aims and objectives of each agency in order to reach agreement before launching a cooperative project. While formal contracts are not necessarily needed, written agreements as to the responsibilities of both parties are extremely helpful if or when difficulties arise. Of equal importance, in my opinion, is the need for personnel who thoroughly understand each other's philosophies and duties. Many public school - public library cooperative ventures come to grief over this point. A weakness in many of these projects is the heavy reliance on the school librarian as the major figure in staffing a joint facility. That the public library take full responsibility for a trained librarian or paraprofessional to work in tandem with the school librarian is essential. School librarians are, for the most part, oriented (and rightly so) to the needs of students and faculty; to expect them to be also expert in dealing with the pre-schooler's need for picture books or his mother's desire for the latest who-dun-it is highly unrealistic. Granted, staffing is an expensive part of the budget, but

not allowing for adequate trained staff by the public library gives the project a handicap which it may never overcome no matter how many books or other materials are provided. In the event that only one fully trained librarian can be provided, and that one is the school librarian, then the scheduled work time and the salary paid should reflect consideration of the added responsibility. Probably the third important ingredient is the commitment of both the school district and the public library to the idea that such projects can work and they will do all they can do to make them work. This calls for flexibility on both sides, a willingness to talk about difficulties and to actively seek means to reconcile divergent points of view.

In these days of uncertain funding, cooperative efforts must be explored and experimented with. The approaches to cooperative endeavors will vary with every community with no one way being the only right way. Working out means of efficiently and economically bringing library service to those who need and want it should be a total community effort even though it might call for changing some long standing rules, regulations, and responsibilities.